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Summary record of the 8th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Vidouris (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Greece)

Contents

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

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In the absence of Mr. Mohamad (Sudan), Mr. Vidouris (Greece), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/62/21 and 205)

1. **Ms. Loo** (Singapore) said that one of the challenges before the Department of Public Information (DPI) was to tap into and manage the new media and the innumerable alternative channels of information that had been created by recent digital technology, revolutionizing communication and making it possible to reach the world public, especially the young, in an unprecedented way. Without abandoning traditional means of communication, the Department had, in fact, begun to ensure greater outreach by routinely expanding and modernizing its website.

2. High-tech communication could, however, be double-edged. Speed did not necessarily guarantee accuracy, and with so much information available on the Internet, it was difficult to differentiate between what was accurate and what was misleading. The new media could potentially enlighten and educate, but they could also confuse and deceive. The United Nations, like any other information provider, would have to rigorously maintain a reputation for credibility by the accuracy of its reporting. Its message must be clear, well articulated and timely.

3. Communication, however, was not a science; it required sensitivity to the perceptions and reactions of the audience. Over the years, the Department had expanded its scope, activities and reach, now managing radio and television broadcasting as well as print and online publications. It should continue to exploit the new communications technologies to get its message across.

4. **Ms. Núñez Mordoche** (Cuba) said that the technology gap between North and South continued to grow and the media was monopolized by a few multinational companies. It was increasingly important to establish a new world order of information given that the media in the developed world often distorted the news and events taking place in the developing countries. The developing world should be given special treatment in the United Nations information system and the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) should do more to disseminate balanced information, taking into account the needs of the target audience. In particular, the use of broadcast media, such as the radio, should continue to be promoted as a means of providing information to the illiterate populations that existed in the countries of the South. Cuba had successfully established a literacy programme entitled "Yo si puedo" which used audio-visual aids and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to broaden the scope and effectiveness of teaching materials.

5. Once again, her delegation wished to denounce the radio and television broadcasts that the United States Government used to provide the Cuban people with distorted information and misleading propaganda. Those broadcasts contravened international law and the procedures of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). During the 2007 fiscal year, the Congress had approved $36 million for such broadcasts and the Government had increased its broadcasts from one to six afternoons a week; many of the broadcasts were transmitted from Miami in contravention of United States broadcasting laws. Each week, United States-based stations broadcast to Cuba more than 2,073 hours of radio and television through 31 different frequencies. Of the 22 stations broadcasting subversive programmes against Cuba, 14 aimed their signals directly towards the country; three of them were the property of the United States Government. Some of the stations could be linked to terrorists who lived in United States territory. In condemning those acts of aggression, her delegation reiterated that the choice of the kind of information that the Cuban people wished to receive was a sovereign decision of her country and not of the United States Government.

6. **Mr. Martínez** (Dominican Republic), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Rio Group, expressed appreciation for what the Department of Public Information was doing to publicize the work of the United Nations and to promote its issues.

7. The Department had worked well with other United Nations bodies to disseminate accurate information more widely. The close collaboration between it and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had helped familiarize the public with the various missions. The Rio Group especially appreciated the conveying of information about the multidimensional character of peacekeeping to all countries, but especially the troop-contributing countries.

8. The United Nations information centres throughout the world, acting as a strategic arm of the Department of Public Information, were doing increasingly valuable work by spreading information more widely and also by making it available to persons with disabilities; that should remain a priority.

9. The Department was endeavouring to make balanced use of the six official languages on the United Nations website; but much more needed to be done to redress the current imbalance. Information, including press releases, should be produced in all official languages. Moreover, the United Nations message would carry further if it were conveyed in as many of the world's languages as possible. In that connection, the Rio Group supported the proposal in paragraph 57 of draft resolution B in the report of the Committee on Information (A/62/21).

10. In order to publicize the United Nations message effectively, traditional means of communication must continue to be used, for they were often the only way of obtaining information in the developing countries. Radio programmes in particular should be broadcast in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese; and more broadcast personnel from the developing countries, who were familiar with their own people, culture and language, should be recruited. Rather than quantifying the cost of multilingualism at the United Nations, the aim should be to reorganize the information structure and staffing to reflect the linguistically diverse world of the six official languages. The technological revolution required any international organization to be staffed with persons able to express themselves in the main languages of the world, and the United Nations must adapt to that new reality.

11. **Mr. Farhane** (Morocco) observed that in an increasingly globalized age, the timely spread of information had become a necessity and a challenge if the Organization was to make its activities known or to interact with the world's peoples. The Department of Public Information should still do more to highlight the importance of the discussions at the United Nations and their impact on people's lives. It should also strive for closer and better collaboration with its information centres throughout the world, with the other United Nations departments and with the network of civil-society organizations in the area of information.

12. The United Nations information centres were instrumental in the free flow of information in the developing countries, where access to the new information and communications technologies was limited. In the restructuring of the information centre network, the situation of each individual centre should be taken into account.

13. The Department should also focus more on the situation of the developing countries, especially in Africa, in order to inform them about the United Nations most effectively. It could not rely on the Internet alone but must make use also of traditional means of communication to reach the most remote regions. By the same token, all information produced by the Department should be in all official languages, in the interests of parity and public access. The website could, moreover, be enhanced by finding a way of assessing if the information provided met the expectations of its users and increased the visibility of the United Nations in the world. It would be an excellent thing if the United Nations could bring its message to the peoples of the world, making complex themes such as climate change, the struggle against HIV/AIDS, the Millennium Development Goals and anti-terrorism more comprehensible. To accomplish that, it should disseminate information in as equitable, impartial, efficient and timely a way as possible. Needless to say, press releases regarding meetings of the various United Nations bodies should always be drafted objectively and there should be consistency between the various language versions.

14. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that in order to strengthen international support for the Organization's activities, the Department should provide all people with accurate, comprehensive, timely and relevant information. It was important for the Department to enhance its technological infrastructure in order to improve its activities in areas of special interest to developing countries. It was regrettable that certain developed countries tried to monopolize the media in order to distort the facts and events relating to developing countries that were not considered allies. In that context, the Department should convene a seminar to address the inequity in the world media.

15. UNICs were key resources in mobilizing public opinion and could serve the Organization in its outreach activities if equipped with modern communication technologies. It would therefore be

interesting to learn what action had been taken to modernize UNICs in developing countries. Stressing the importance of disseminating information in local languages, he said that those languages should be used for developing web pages and broadcasting radio programmes. His delegation appreciated the Department's commitment to maintaining a culture of evaluation and suggested that the effectiveness of the Centres should be examined. Moreover, since freedom of expression entailed a responsibility to respect cultural diversity, the Department should play a leading role in promoting respect for all cultures, religions and civilizations.

16. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to continue promoting the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations in order to increase understanding among nations; would appreciate being kept informed about the Secretariat's initiatives aimed at promoting that agenda. His delegation called on the Department to increase the number of participants in the annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and to continue its annual programme for Palestinian journalists.

17. **Mr. Belinga Eboutou** (Cameroon) said that the current agenda item was of particular importance in a world where information could quickly be disseminated. The ideas thus transmitted could increase solidarity or cause divisions and the ideas of cultures and societies with the greatest means at their disposal had an advantage. Regrettably those ideas often contained preconceived notions and attitudes that led to intolerance and lack of understanding. For example, some media reporting on Africa tended to highlight only calamity and negativity. As the President of Cameroon had pointed out earlier this year, Africa was generally stereotyped as a place of endless conflicts afflicted by innumerable problems. That caricature masked another reality, that of a more stable and attractive Africa determined to meet the challenges of development.

18. The media had great leverage in the dissemination of culture and could weaken and even destroy cultural mainstays or entire societies. By denigrating some cultures the media gave undue influence to other cultural models. In 1999, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had stated that the global information society was leading to the marginalization of most countries, dividing the world into the information-rich and information-poor. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, with only 19 per cent of the world's population, accounted for 90 per cent of Internet usage.

19. If nothing was done the struggle of African countries in particular, to share in the global information society would be difficult if not doomed in advance. He therefore called for the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society with a view to closing the information divide. In that context he commended the Department of Public Information for sparing no effort in promoting a truly globalized and inclusive information society.

20. The Department should continue to give priority to informing the international community about economic and social development in Africa and the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The United Nations Information Centres played an invaluable role in the diffusion of information about the Organization. While the status of those Centres should be evaluated on a case by case basis, he stressed that current efforts to rationalize the work of the Organization should not affect the information centre in Yaoundé, which was particularly useful for the francophone countries of the central African subregion. That Centre's resources should in fact be strengthened.

21. **Ms. Miyoshi** (Japan) said that it was significant that the participants at the recent International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, which had been organized by DPI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, had agreed on the importance of maintaining an ongoing dialogue between Palestine and Israel. Her delegation commended the Department for its efforts to raise awareness about climate change and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and encouraged it to continue those efforts. Her delegation also welcomed the political commitment expressed by world leaders at the recent High-Level Event on Climate Change and noted that it was now time for the world to act. Member States must cooperate with the Department in promoting environmental protection and development.

22. In cooperation with various non-governmental organizations, her Government had hosted a series of public forums on United Nations reform with the aim of fostering an exchange of views with civil society. In 2008, it would host the fourth Tokyo International

Conference on African Development, for it believed it was important that Africa should achieve peace and prosperity. Finally, her delegation reiterated its support for the Department, and urged it to make full use of UNICs.

23. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) said that DPI played a crucial role in drawing the world's attention to a variety of issues. He stressed the importance of the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine, including the recent International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East held in Tokyo on the topic of re-engaging the Israelis and the Palestinians in the search for a comprehensive and lasting political settlement.

24. He hoped that DPI would continue the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists' Fellowship Programme, but pointed out that, even as the Committee was discussing the role of media in promoting Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, Israel continued to prevent journalists from taking part in the Department's media training programmes. It had barred three Palestinians from going to the United States Consulate in Jerusalem to pick up visas on the grounds that no one under the age of 35 was permitted to leave Gaza. The Israeli authorities were also continuing to hinder implementation of paragraph 3 (d) of General Assembly resolution 61/24 calling for DPI to organize and promote fact-finding news missions for journalists to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

25. His delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to raise global awareness of Palestinian issues, and urged it to devote greater attention to the dialogue between civilizations, particularly in the light of recent instances of defamation of Islam and the Prophet in certain western media. He praised the Department's efforts to spread awareness of United Nations issues, particularly within academic institutions, inter alia through its partnership with international broadcast networks and through the *UN Chronicle*.

26. **Mr. Nay Win** (Myanmar) said that, in the modern information age, developing countries increasingly needed to harness the tools of information and communication technology for their development, but were impeded by lack of resources and infrastructure. Accordingly, Myanmar welcomed the strategic approach taken by the Department of Public Information, which would help bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

27. Regrettably certain Powers were trying to exploit that divide and to impose their will on weaker members of the world community, in particular, by focusing only on negative aspects of developing countries and ignoring their efforts to uplift the quality of life of their peoples. In that context, he stressed the important role played by United Nations information centres around the world: they raised public awareness of the Organization's ideals, promoted support for its work, and also served as an invaluable source of knowledge and learning for students.

28. Finally, he underlined the need, in a world facing the challenges of armed conflict, religious intolerance and the effects of climate change, to foster an understanding among young people of diversity and peaceful coexistence. To that end, he called on the Department, through its outreach activities, to promote understanding of different cultures and civilizations.

29. **Mr. Elsherbini** (Egypt) said that, given the growing importance of information and communication technology, it was vital for the United Nations to sustain international cooperation in information and communication, with a view to narrowing the gaps in information flow between countries and helping build the media infrastructure of developing countries. In that endeavour, the Department of Public Information had a particularly important role as the mouthpiece of the Organization and responsible for promoting its positive image to the outside world.

30. The inability of the United Nations to resolve long-standing conflicts had affected the way people viewed the Organization. Accordingly, it was vital to spotlight what the United Nations had achieved in terms of peacekeeping, protection of the environment, pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and safeguarding of human rights.

31. In the context of spreading the message of the United Nations, his delegation stressed the importance of multilingualism and the required balance between the Organization's six official languages, which was vital to ensuring the widest possible dissemination of that message.

32. Egypt also called for continued efforts by the Committee on Information to raise awareness of the Middle East situation, by providing objective media

coverage that would help sustain efforts to end the Israeli occupation which had begun in 1967 and to give effect to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples. In that context, Egypt supported such meetings as the annual seminar on peace in the Middle East, organized by the Committee on Information. The media also had an important role to play in the endeavour to meet the Millennium Development Goals, by raising international awareness of such issues as environmental protection, the eradication of poverty and women's and children's rights in Africa.

33. With regard to the planned streamlining of the United Nations network of information centres, he stressed the importance of dialogue between the United Nations and the beneficiary countries, taking into account the specific circumstances of each region and the need to make optimum use of the available resources so as to ensure the continued operation of the centres. In that context, his delegation had taken note of the proposal contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/62/205) to strengthen the leadership of regional information centres in Cairo and Mexico, enabling them to assist neighbouring centres in strategic planning and work programmes.

34. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the United Nations would put out a message in the media that would promote dialogue and understanding between cultures, dispel the confusion between terrorism and the legitimate armed resistance of occupied peoples and help narrow the information gap between the North and the South.

35. **Ms. Zakharova** (Russian Federation) said that interaction between the Department of Public Information and various United Nations agencies was a key element of its mission to provide objective and high-quality coverage of the Organization's activities. To that end, her delegation welcomed the strategic approach outlined by the Secretary-General in his report on information questions (A/62/205) and supported the key thematic priorities identified for the Department's work, namely, peace and security, climate change, the Millennium Development Goals and human rights.

36. It also supported efforts to rationalize the work of the United Nations information centres, based on the three-track approach, and stressed the need to make information materials available in local languages and to organize events with the participation of prominent local personalities and the involvement of local media. In particular, she reaffirmed the need for all information centres to be treated equally, in such matters as budget allocations and staffing. She was pleased to report that the Moscow information centre was performing useful work, publicizing the work of the Organization not only in the Russian Federation but also in other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

37. Respect for the principle of multilingualism, in particular through developing United Nations radio broadcasts and website materials in all the official languages, was an important aspect of the Department's work. In that context, she commended the Department on its efforts to improve its operations, including through wider use of official languages, development of partnerships with local, national and regional radio stations, conduct of press briefings and other measures.

38. Her delegation believed that, in performance of its principal task of publicizing the work of the United Nations and enhancing its image, the Department should focus on developing the use of cutting-edge information technology, alongside the traditional media; ensuring parity of the Organization's official languages; and responding to erroneous or distorted reports in the media about United Nations activities. Without prompt refutation of false reports, many of the Department's activities would be rendered futile.

39. While modern information and communication technology created many new opportunities, it was a matter of concern that access thereto was very uneven and her delegation accordingly called for efforts to ensure equal access by all to the benefits of the global information society.

40. Turning to the priority issue of dialogue among civilizations, she observed that, as a multireligious and multi-ethnic State, the Russian Federation had learned that the coexistence of religious communities on the basis of mutual respect and universal values promoted the cohesion of society and the growth of its spiritual values. It stood ready to share the fruits of its experience in that area with the Department.

41. Finally, she recalled the hosting, earlier in 2007, of Holocaust Remembrance Day and observed that her country held sacred the memory of the victims of Nazism. At the same time, she stressed that the

memory of the victims of the Second World War could not be separated from that of their liberators and, in that regard, she deplored the rising trend in many countries to glorify Nazism and the desecrations of monuments to those who had fought against it.

42. **Ms. Cato** (Philippines) expressed her delegation's sympathy to the people of Pakistan following the recent bombings in Karachi and also noted with regret the bombing in Manila. She commended DPI for disseminating information about the Organization's achievements to a large and diverse audience and for generating sustained public interest in the Organization's key thematic priorities, including peace and security, climate change, MDGs and human rights. The Department had also broadened the Organization's worldwide reach by strengthening its partnerships with Member States, United Nations bodies and civil society and was making effective use of traditional media as well as ICTs and enhancing its relations with members of the press.

43. Her delegation called on the Department to make use of the mass media to foster the culture of dialogue among civilizations and to promote religious and cultural understanding. It expressed its appreciation to the Department for promoting interfaith cooperation, particularly through the High-level Dialogue on inter-religious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace. As a troop-contributing country, the Philippines welcomed the Department's efforts to highlight the achievements and challenges of peacekeeping and looked forward to further cooperation between DPI and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The Department should expand its information campaign to as many troop-contributing countries as possible in recognition of their invaluable contributions to peacekeeping.

44. **Mr. Sealy** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), commended the Committee on Information for its oversight of the work of the Department of Public Information, which played a key role in disseminating information about the Organization's activities and the challenges it faced. While supporting the increasing use of information and communications technology to reach a wider audience, he stressed that, for the vast majority of the peoples of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the most relevant means for disseminating information were traditional media such as the print and electronic media, including radio. He therefore welcomed the Department's efforts to disseminate programmes and video and feature material directly to broadcasters worldwide via satellite and the Internet.

45. Caribbean programming, consisting of a daily news programme, and a weekly and monthly news programme broadcast on radio to all the islands of the Caribbean, should be continued. The Department should also report on the extent to which information on decolonization was disseminated to the Territories, including those which were associate members of CARICOM, and provide the United Nations Information Centres in the region with the necessary resources for that purpose.

46. The information needs of the CARICOM countries were managed by the United Nations Information Centre for the Caribbean, located in Port of Spain. His Government had been underwriting the rental costs of the Centre, allowing it to devote its full budget to outreach and communication activities. The programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 should allocate sufficient resources to modernize the Centre's information and communications systems and allow the Director and national information officer to visit the capitals of the region with a view to building partnerships with the media. Such contacts were absolutely necessary if the Centre was to reach a wider audience and provide timely information about the Organization's activities. In that regard, he said that the Secretariat and the Information Centres should ensure that the list of "Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About" and articles by senior United Nations officials were more widely disseminated around the world.

47. The Department should further strengthen its information resources in the Caribbean by appointing national information officers to the UNDP offices in Kingston and Bridgetown and should constantly review the allocation of resources to Information Centres in the developing world.

48. The Cyberschoolbus website, for example, was an important tool for reaching students and youth, as was the new education website devoted to disarmament and non-proliferation. However, the latter's statistical information on countries needed to be updated.

49. He welcomed the support provided by the Department for the exhibition held earlier that year at the Secretariat to commemorate the 200th anniversary

of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Department should ensure that the topic of slavery was comprehensively and sensitively addressed in the next issue of the *UN Chronicle*, which would deal with the theme of racial discrimination.

50. Finally, he said that greater awareness of the Organization's work in the fields of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, development and human rights would lead to greater support for the Organization's aims. The Department must therefore continue its information activities.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.